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ABSTRACT

The Child Find Program in Dade County, Florida, a federal project designed to identify exceptional children (to 21 years old) not presently receiving an education, is described. (IM)

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FAMILIARITY WITH CHILD FIND

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Familiarity with Child Find

Child Find in Dade County, Florida started in November of 1975. It is a federal project constructed to assis PL 94-142 which states that all exceptional children not receiving an education must be identified. Child Find is paving the way for this law by identifying those children not presently being served. In Dade County our job is a bit more involved than other communities becuase of the trilingual group of inhabitants consisting of American, Cuban and Haitian families.

We are very fortunate in having Livia Alonso who excels in all three languages and who is also a very diplomatic person which is a strong characteristic necessary for this type of activity. Mrs. Alonso not only goes to the home for a visit but must also carry on a complete awareness campaign informing the community of her unique program. Dade County Public Schools is the 5th largest school system in the United States and the Exceptionl Child Education Department consists of approximately 22,000 students.

Since the target population of Child Find is 0-21 it works in conjunction with The High Risk Clinic at Jackson Memorial Hospital. At the hospital, 6000 premature births a year are recorded. 10% of that amount of 600 are high risk infants. Certain criteria in labeling a child high risk may be anoxia, some dystrophy or general birth defects. Some children outgrow these problems. Others who are not as fortunate, are followed by the hospital until the age of three when they can be picked up and placed into the Child Find System.

Since the name of the game is AWARENESS, 50% of Mrs. Alonso's time is spent dealing in this area. She can be found in waiting rooms and emergency rooms showing a slide presentation in English and Spanish. She maintains contacts with HRS agencies, Headstart. Easter Seal, Bureau for the Blind, etc. She makes one or two presentations weekly to faculty meetings, PTA's, advisory council meetings, etc. When asked which source gave her the most referrals, she replied "radio spots and personal interviews". In the last two years alsone, $3,000.00 has been spent on an awareness campaign.

Recently, our Child Find Program was published in the December 1976 issue of American Education, a magazine distributed by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. This article has created numerous responses from across the nation from both laymen and educators. In fact, someone is to be here today from Wisconsin in response to that article (Mr. Robert Hentschell).

Another letter was from a custodian at University Hospital in Iowa City who wants to get more involved. Another was from an attorney in Memphis, Tennessee serving on the Governors Advisory Council for Handicapped Children..

As you can see, Child Find, especially in Dade County has sparked much human interest.

Many of the referrals Mrs. Alonso receives provide very dubious information. One referraly may only give an address with a statement such as, "there is a 13 year old boy at this address and we see him home during the day". No phone number or parents name - just an address. These are the ones she enjoys the most. She calls a referral such as this "Sherlock Holmes on the prowl". At first she had many misgivings about going to these homes. She would think of what they would say when they answered the door and how she would react to their questions. If the voice answered,"who is it" in Spanish and Livia responded in Spanish, the door opened immediately. Surprisingly enough, people are waiting for a helping hand and when it comes along, they want to grab it.
A reply such as my name is so and so, I am with Dade County Public Schools and I am here to help you are words of magic. This goes regardless of the neighborhood, rather a ghetto, migrant camps, low or high socio-economic. It seems to be understood by these parents that she is there with the sincere and honest feeling of helping them.

Once a child has been referred and identified, a home visit is only made when there is doubt as to the exceptionality or if there is no phone number. If a parent says the child is speech impaired, has a communication disorder or is emotionally disturbed, Livia goes out to do a screening to determine the correct classification.

Some instrucments used in screening are the PPVT, SICD, Slosson, and Spanish English Reference Test. These are given not only to screen the child but to aid the staff wjem the child comes for evaluation as to the language the child is using in communication. This also supports the stress of non-biased testing which is beginning to prevail throughout

school systems nationwide.

Once Livia has received the parent permission and verified the exceptionality, she gathers data on previous medical, educational, psychological and any other work performed on the child. Once all the information is gathered, a packet is prepared and the child is scheduled for an evaluation at the Dade County Public Schools Diagnostic and Resource Center. If there is any need for medical evaluations, neurologicals, psychiatric, etc., the monies to cover these are provided thru Child Find. We can only use funds for these children to cover diagnostics not remediation. An example we had was a P M R child who was sedated in order to have his vision checked. The examination revealed cataracts and a detached tetina. In order to remediate this problem, we worked in conjunction with the Division of Retardation to provide for surgery and expenses not covered by Child Find.

Almost 50% of the Dade Child Find are of Spanish background. Many times these families simply are unaware that their children can go to public school. Some families definitely hide their children out of shame, ignorance or despair. Sometimes a caller will report a child as having a learning disability , but after close questioning, it turns out the child really has some major handicap or deforimity that the parent can never seem to accept.

Child Find does not pretend to offer miracles, sudden cures, or total recovery. It does give an instant reward. One finds a child who is receiving nothing and places him in a setting where he can grow.